

SWEDISH ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEYS

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Background and Aims: Environmental conditions, the general population's experience of these, and the level of knowledge throughout the community concerning the effect of environmental factors on public health are changing at an ever increasing rate. It is therefore important to regularly update the foundation of knowledge upon which decision making processes concerning environmental measures and priorities are dependent. The periodically published environmental health reports contribute significantly to such updates.

Methods: In Sweden, these reports are to a large extent based upon the National Environmental Health Surveys (MHE). The surveys have been conducted every 4th year since 1999, alternating between adults and children. The response rate has been between 60-73%. Bias in the sampling and the proportion of respondents in different groups has been adjusted for by calibration and hence, the responses are representative of the target population. The 4th is currently in progress and the invitation to respond has been sent to parents of about 80 000 children aged 6-10 months, 4, 8, 12 and 16 years. The survey includes questions regarding children's health and annoyance in relation to various environmental factors.

Results: The results give an up to date describe of how the general population is exposed to risks caused by various environmental factors. Moreover, the results show differences between various sub-groups within the population, such as age, sex, and social class. Geographic differences both between but also within the different regions can be studied. Finally, time trends regarding exposures and annoyance related to various environmental factors can be followed. The surveys are also used for research purposes, and to evaluate the Swedish environmental quality objectives.

Conclusions: The periodical Environmental Health survey is an extremely important source of information in decision making processes that aim to promote awareness among citizens about the risks associated with environmental factors and to reduce the risk they pose to public health.